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Festival Brings Music, Restoration

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Festival brings music, restoration



Sylvain Frémaux and Jill Timmons launched the Festival d'Herbilly, a music festival to raise funds for a church restoration in France.

Jill Timmons understands the healing power of music.

Timmons, professor of music at Linfield College, along with her husband, Sylvain Frémaux, the founding director of the Linfield Chamber Orchestra, are bringing music and restoration to the tiny hamlet of Herbilly in central France. And their work is paving the way for Linfield student pianists to study there.

The two have started a music festival, which will also fund restoration of a 12th century church damaged during World War II. On the night of May 8, 1944, German artillery shot down a fully loaded RAF Lancaster bomber over Herbilly, leaving a large crater in the town. Thirteen people died and many lost their homes. St. Aignan church and its bell tower were damaged but remained standing.

Timmons and Frémaux's summer home in Herbilly, one of the few structures to survive the bombing, is located across the street from the church. Both buildings are historical monuments.

"When we bought the house in 2003, villagers asked us when we were going to bring music to the town," said Timmons, who along with Frémaux has worked extensively in France over the years.

That was all it took. Last summer Timmons and Frémaux launched the Festival d'Herbilly, a music festival to be held annually to raise money for the church restoration. The festival is sponsored by the city of Mer and the Association de Saint Aignan. Timmons and Laura Klugherz, a violist from Colgate University, performed at the first fund raising concert in July. Blüthner Pianos of Leipzig, Germany, provided a grand piano free of charge.

For the first time in the villagers' memory, music filled the church.

"It's something to see an ancient church in this countryside setting," Timmons said. "Each time I walk up the heavily worn stone steps of the church, I realize that someone from the 12th century once walked up these same steps."

The festival will host the

Linfield Summer Piano Institute, a four-day immersion for pianists previously held in Newport. Timmons hopes to include Linfield students in the institute, and future festivals will feature a variety of international artists.

The Festival d'Herbilly has served as a catalyst for a physical restoration, but it also symbolizes a partnership among the French, German and American cultures, Timmons said.

"This international group has come together, not only to restore a 12th century tower, but in celebration of music and culture in this rural region," Timmons said.

— Laura Davis

Catch a preview of the 2006 St. Aignan church concert.

Jill Timmons, piano, and Laura Klugherz, viola, will perform on April 30 at 8 p.m. in Melrose Auditorium at Linfield.



St. Aignan Church, located in Herbilly in central France, was built in the 12th century, around the same time as the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.